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Re: HB 4410 Sheltrown

Rep. Tim Melton, Chair
Members of the Education Committee:

Thank you for the opportunity to speak about the issue of alternative pathways to a high school diploma. Bill #4410 is important because it acknowledges that some human beings are not able to fit the framework determined by the requirements of the Michigan Merit Curriculum. Bill #4410 provides a flexible framework which accomodates the requirements of the learning disabled student while preserving the spirit of high expectations which is at the heart of the MMC.

Students we refer to as "LD Categorical" generally have ability levels in the low average range in one or more academic areas. Most of my students are disabled in the area of math reasoning. An IQ of 75 in math reasoning is common among this population. These students are able to use formulas and calculators to solve math problems related to independent living, such as measurement, consumer math, banking, etc. However, the reasoning required to solve problems in algebra and much of geometry is simply beyond their abilities.

These same students are capable and even gifted in other areas. The fundamental task for teachers in special education is to discover each student's strength and guide the student to build on that strength, continually adding and mastering skills. Students with disabilities who reach grades eleven and twelve have demonstrated resolve that many average students haven't had to develop. If we deny a diploma to a student who has worked hard despite obstacles, then we are placing more importance on a rigid ideal than on real people. These young people who have persevered deserve to be able to complete a job application and indicate that, yes, they have graduated from high school with a diploma. Their plans for a productive future are just as important as the plans of the average or above-average student.